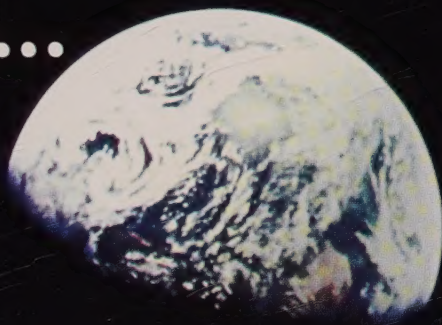


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Editorial

WE HOPE THAT as our readers look at the cover picture of our planet EARTH suspended in space, a distance of about a quarter of a million miles from the MOON, they feel like the astronauts on board Apollo 8 who took this photograph. As they orbited the Moon and witnessed this 'earth rise', William Anders said:

'For the first time we saw the beautiful orb of our planet coming up over this relatively stark, inhospitable lunar horizon and it brought back to me that indeed even though our flight was focussed on the Moon, it was really the Earth that was the most important to us.'

It was important to them because back there on that multi-coloured planet they had families who were probably enjoying the sunshine or the rain, relatives who were moving about freely in an atmosphere designed for their comfort and pleasure, while they were circling this hostile moon that had nothing friendly to offer them if their life support systems failed them.

The words of William Anders bring home to us things that we take for granted: the fact that we dwell on a planet that is unique in our solar system, a planet that may be unique in the universe!

The recently repaired Hubble telescope orbiting the earth is now revealing more and more wonders of this universe but still nothing like the earth has been seen in the vastness of space. Earth with mankind and its natural life are still unique; everything on our planet is just right for us to dwell here safely. We have the right sort of sun; we are the right distance from the sun; our planet is the right size; it has the right axis and rotation; we have the right materials on earth, lots of water, the elements of carbon, oxygen, nitrogen and hydrogen. We have the right kind of sea, the right kind of atmosphere. Everything is just right and it leads even die-hard evolutionists to use words such as 'design', 'devised', 'invented' and even 'created', as they search for ways to describe the wonders of life on earth.

As followers of Jesus, the publishers of this magazine firmly believe in a CREATOR. We firmly believe that this same God has revealed His will and purpose in His Word, the Bible.

These Holy Scriptures have over the centuries proclaimed that the God of Israel is also the Creator of the Universe, and they have also put forward in clear terms the purpose of God in creating this Earth and mankind upon it.

In the article on page seven the writer directs us to God not only as our Creator but as our Father and Rewarder. From God's Word he points us to the way the sweet Psalmist of Israel, King David, viewed the world we live in:

'When I consider thy heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and the stars, which thou hast ordained; What is man, that thou art mindful of him.'

The writer goes on to show that God is mindful of man. He has a purpose and plan with mankind that can lead us ultimately to a great reward. But to obtain that reward

¹Psalm 8.3,4

of everlasting life we must believe that God exists. It is no good trying to reconcile our minds with the unproven theory of evolution if we wish to relate to our Creator!

The ancients who wrote the Bible under Divine inspiration had knowledge of things revealed to them by God that our present day astronauts and scientists are now able to confirm. They knew for example that the Earth was round and that it had an atmosphere to protect them; the prophet Isaiah declared of God that:

'It is he that sitteth upon the circle [Heb. meaning arch, vault, compass] of the earth and the inhabitants thereof are as grasshoppers; that stretcheth out the heavens as a curtain [Heb. meaning thin veil], and spreadeth them out as a tent to dwell in.'²

Men like Isaiah had no way of knowing these things on their own, it was communicated to them by God. In the same way God declared to them things that He intended to do on this earth. He revealed to them that Jesus Christ would come out of their nation of Israel and that he would be the bringer of life and salvation to mankind. Another of our articles on page three is based on one of the sayings of Jesus, '*Come unto me*'.

God in His wisdom brought His Son into this world to teach us how to reconcile ourselves to our Creator. To obtain the reward that God offers us we have to accept the Bible's clear message given for example by Peter, that:

'Salvation is found in no-one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved.'³

We urge you to read God's Word, to study its message, to heed the words of the Creator, as He tells us what He wants us to do to become His children and heirs of His promises. All those explorations into space, whether by manned rockets and space shuttles or by unmanned satellites have still told us nothing of great value. We have not learnt anything that helps us to explain our mortality or tells us how we can escape it! GOD'S WORD DOES! In its pages there is a message of hope for all of us. Outside those pages there is only the thinking of men which for the most part urges us to follow spurious philosophies and ideologies that lead man away from the truth of God's Word. If you follow the evolutionist's theories you are offered only the thought that your life on earth is the result of the forces of blind chance - which will only end in oblivion. We put before you the alternative to this. We urge you to study God's Word, which offers you the opportunity of seeking everlasting life through Jesus Christ.

We hope the articles in this issue, and any other material we can offer you, will help you in your studies and lead you to remember your Creator before it is too late:

'O taste and see that the Lord is good: blessed is the man that trusteth in him.'⁴

Ken Dennis
Dartford, Kent

²Isaiah 40.22 ³Acts 4.12 (NIV) ⁴Psalms 34.8

Sayings of Jesus

‘Come unto me’

THE IMPLICATIONS OF these words of Jesus are that he is set apart, and superior to all other men and women. The words of Paul to the Philippians bear this out:

‘Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name: That at that name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.’¹

This difference was clearly seen during his lifetime, when by God’s power he did many mighty works such as raising Lazarus from the dead, or speaking great truths to the people, so that they confessed: ‘*Never man spake like this man.*’² Or when the voice of God was heard to say: ‘*This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.*’³ When having suffered an unbelievably cruel and unjust death at the hands of a people for whom he had done so much, he could say as he hung on the cross ‘*Father, forgive them.*’⁴

Now this great man, during his lifetime, said to all who heard and saw the great things he did: ‘*Come unto me*’⁵ and for nearly 2,000 years since his ascension to heaven, the same invitation has been extended to many generations, not through the voice of Jesus directly of course, but through God’s Word - the Bible.

THE DIVINE INVITATION

But what does this invitation mean? How can a person come to Jesus today? Well, let us think about some verses of Scripture which tell us about the Divine invitation. In John’s Gospel record we read the words of Jesus:

‘No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him.’⁶

¹Philippians 2.9-11 ²John 7.46 ³Matthew 17.5 ⁴Luke 23.34 ⁵Matthew 11.28 ⁶John 6.44

Now here is a simple yet profound truth recognised by Jesus, as he said 'My Father is greater than I.'⁷ God is the creator of all life. The Apostle Paul wrote '... in him we live and move and have our being.'⁸ It is He alone who has devised a plan for man's salvation. As the Prophet Isaiah wrote: 'Therefore his arm brought salvation unto him...'⁹ So Jesus, born of Mary, was sent by God that: '...whosoever believeth in him might not perish, but have eternal life.'¹⁰ John describes Jesus as '...the Word ... made flesh ... full of grace and truth.'¹¹ Through him - that is through belief in him as the 'Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world.'¹² - God calls men and women to become like Jesus, to be sons and daughters of God.¹³

Today, the Bible, God's Word, extends to us the Divine offer of salvation, for Jesus told his disciples:

'Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptised shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned.'¹⁴

And again the Apostle Paul wrote concerning the Gospel:

'...it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth.'¹⁵

So we understand from these verses that we can come to Jesus, by God's grace, through the power of His word - so clearly set forth in the message of the Gospel.

THE HOPE OF THE GOSPEL

During his life on earth, Jesus preached the Gospel - the glad tidings of the coming Kingdom of God; his words and deeds appealed to the poor and despised - the Scripture says 'the common people heard him gladly.'¹⁶ They were the ones who acknowledged their need for Jesus, who offered them something which no one else could - HE OFFERED THEM A HOPE - of life beyond our present short existence. So Matthew records the appeal of Jesus to those who will listen to his words:

'Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.'¹⁷

It is clear from the context of this passage that Jesus was talking about more than just removing from their shoulders a heavy physical burden such as the leprosy or blindness which many suffered from, or one of the many other problems which were the everyday experience of those in Christ's day. For eventually the inevitable hand of death would claim them and the removal of such a burden - though a tremendous relief in the short term - would be only temporary. But the rest Jesus offers those who come to him to hear his life-imparting words, is that spoken of in the letter to the Hebrews:

'There remaineth therefore a rest to the people of God.'¹⁸

The rest as Paul states, refers to the establishment of the Kingdom of God, with Jesus Christ as king over all the earth, when wars and oppression shall cease and instead there will be peace and prosperity.

⁷John 14.28 ⁸Acts 17.28 ⁹Isaiah 59.16 ¹⁰John 3.15 ¹¹John 1.14 ¹²John 1.29 ¹³John 1.12
¹⁴Mark 16.15,16 ¹⁵Romans 1.16 ¹⁶Mark 12.37 ¹⁷Matthew 11.28 ¹⁸Hebrews 4.9

THE LESSON OF HUMILITY

We can perhaps now appreciate from the foregoing, that in order to attain to the promised time of rest and eternal life and happiness, we must acknowledge our need for help and put our trust in the Saviour. The well known incident recorded in the Gospels, about Jesus and the little children comes to mind, particularly the words '*... for of such is the kingdom of God.*'¹⁹

The little children who came to Jesus showed a spirit of trust and dependence that Jesus tells us is the outlook to be adopted by all who would come to him. This is the meaning of true humility - recognising unreservedly that Jesus is the great teacher sent from God. The words of the Old Testament remind us again of the need for humility:

'...to this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and that trembleth at my word.'²⁰

So we are led to the conclusion that, as the offer of God's gift through Jesus is so great, that those who come to him must from then on lead a changed life. Jesus is then given first place in their lives. The Gospel writer Matthew tells us what Jesus requires of us:

'If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me.'²¹

A NEW LIFE

In Paul's letter to the Romans, the apostle tells us how we should '*walk in newness of life.*'²² Yes, having come to Jesus and been baptised (a symbol of dying and rising to a new life as he did), the believer no longer goes about living aimlessly and carelessly, but rather with renewed purpose, as one who recognises that they have been brought from death to life. They are no longer slaves to sin, but having wholeheartedly obeyed the form of teaching delivered to them, they become instead slaves to righteousness.

When Jesus walked by the sea of Galilee, he said to Simon and Andrew his brother '*Come follow me.*' He added something else: '*and I will make you fishers of men.*'²³ Here Jesus introduces another principle - that those who come to him must take on the task of telling others the same 'good news.' This is seen in the case of the disciples, who Jesus sent forth to preach the Gospel of the kingdom of God.

After Jesus ascended to heaven, the apostles continued this work of preaching to the people. As an example of this, when Paul came to Athens, it is recorded:

'...his spirit was stirred in him, when he saw the city wholly given to idolatry.'²⁴

He then proceeded to preach the Gospel that he had received. It is true that the world then and now is filled with a variety of strange gods that men and women in their ignorance and stubbornness worship. But those who come to Jesus and learn of him, by their understanding of the Gospel, become instruments in God's hand,

¹⁹Mark 10.14 ²⁰Isaiah 66.2 ²¹Matthew 16.24 ²²Romans 6.4 ²³Mark 1.17 (NIV) ²⁴Acts 17.16

through whom God lightens the darkness of men's minds and brings hope to otherwise dark and hopeless lives.

But not all are interested or willing to hear. The record in the book of Acts tells of those who, when they heard Paul's inspired words, said: '*We will hear thee again of this matter,*'²⁵ and turned away with no intention of learning. Jesus himself had a similar experience, for, as John records '*He came unto his own, and his own received him not.*'²⁶ But those who do respond to the Divine invitation with a good and willing heart will fully appreciate the power, logic and truth of the message of God's word.

And so we are taught that, having come to Jesus and learned the truth of our mortality and the greatness of the love that God unfolds to the willing heart, nothing in this present fleeting human existence, can compare with it. Therefore the number one priority in our life will be to follow our new Master in response to his gracious invitation - '*Come unto me*'.

THE GIFT OF GOD

Coming to Jesus means obedience to his commandments and commitment to a new way of life. Now Jesus had some hard words to say to the Jews of his day who failed to respond to that invitation:

'Search the scriptures: for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me. And ye will not come to me, that ye might have life... But I know you, that ye have not the love of God in you.'²⁷

The words of Jesus urge us to search through the Scriptures to find eternal life. This must be carried out with an unbiased mind, a repentant heart and a desire to love God. If that is done in sincerity, then He will in His own good time, give us His precious gift for '*... the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.*'²⁸

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West Midlands

²⁵Acts 17.32 ²⁶John 1.11 ²⁷John 5.39-42 ²⁸Romans 6.23

God:

Creator - Father - Rewarder

IT IS SURPRISING that there are so many reasonable, thoughtful people in this world who find it impossible to accept the existence of God. The careful design which is clearly seen in every aspect of nature should be sufficient evidence of the fact that a being with superhuman powers was responsible for creating the universe. The forces which were required to bring into being the laws of nature - and which are still needed to maintain them - are so obviously beyond the capabilities of man. As the Psalmist said in the course of one of his prayers to God:

'When I consider thy heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and the stars, which thou hast ordained; What is man, that thou art mindful of him?'¹

The fact that there is a God, the true Christian does not question for a moment. By definition a Christian is a person who believes in and follows Jesus Christ. He will therefore accept without reservation the words of his master when he also said, in one of his prayers:

'And this is life eternal, that they [his followers] might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent.'²

GOD'S GIFT

One of the most prominent of the early Christians was the Apostle Paul and in one of his letters he wrote this:

'But without faith it is impossible to please him [God]; for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.'³

Here undoubtedly is the key to life, for the reward God offers to those who seek and find Him is the gift of eternal life together with a place in the everlasting kingdom which He is going to set up on the earth.

What then do we know about God? All the information we have is to be found in the Bible, which is His message to man. There is much about God that we cannot fully understand, simply because, as mere humans, we do not have the necessary mental capabilities. God is a spirit being and is not subject to any of the restrictions which we take for granted. For example, a fact which we with our limited life span naturally find difficult to comprehend, is that God has always existed and will never

¹Psalm 8,3,4 ²John 17.3 ³Hebrews 11.6

cease to exist; but the reality of His underived immortality is confirmed in the Book of Psalms in these words:

'Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever thou hadst formed the earth and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting, thou art God.'⁴

Naturally our perception of time is quite different from God's. Whilst we have a very limited amount of time to spend, He literally has all the time in the world at His disposal. The Apostle Peter highlighted the difference when he wrote:

'...one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day.'⁵

God's ability to know about everything that is going on in all parts of the universe is another of His attributes that is not easy for us to understand. Because our own faculties are so limited we can be totally unaware of events that are taking place just a few hundred yards away from us, or even something that is being said in the next room; but it is impossible to hide anything from God. It is David, the Psalmist again who paints a very vivid word picture of this all-seeing and all-knowing attribute of God:

'...where can I flee from your presence? [he asks God] If I go up to the heavens, you are there; if I make my bed in the depths, you are there. If I rise on the wings of the dawn, if I settle on the far side of the sea, even there your hand will guide me, your right hand will hold me fast.'⁶

As well as our actions, even our thoughts, motives and future intentions are known to God. Consider some more words found in the same Psalm:

'O Lord, you have searched me and you know me. You know when I sit and when I rise; you perceive my thoughts from afar. You discern my going out and my lying down; you are familiar with all my ways. Before a word is on my tongue you know it completely, O Lord.'⁷

Jesus spoke about this amazing attribute of God to know even the most insignificant things that were taking place. He explained how it enables God to care and provide for those who seek Him in truth. This is what he said:

'Are not five sparrows sold for two farthings, and not one of them is forgotten before God? But even the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear not therefore: ye are of more value than many sparrows.'⁸

GOD'S POWER

Wonderful though this omniscience of God is, it does not stand alone, for He is also omnipotent, the possessor of unlimited power. He is capable not only of over-seeing and arranging the lives and circumstances of individuals, but also of manipulating and planning events on an international scale. Indeed, as the creator and sustainer of the entire universe He can, and has on occasions, adapted the laws of nature which He had originally devised, in order to suit a particular purpose which He had in mind. At the individual level the prophet Isaiah records how God inter-

⁴*Psalm 90.2* ⁵*II Peter 3.8* ⁶*Psalm 139.7-10 (NIV)* ⁷*Psalm 139.1-4 (NIV)* ⁸*Luke 12.6*

vened in the life of Hezekiah in order to cure him of a fatal illness. As far as international events are concerned the prophet Daniel also praised God in these words: '...wisdom and might are his: And he changeth the times and the seasons: he removeth kings, and setteth up kings....'⁹

God's ability to harness and make use of natural forces is evident from such events as the flood which He brought upon the earth in the days of Noah.

The Bible tells us that God is a spirit being: one who possesses powers and abilities that are so far beyond our own personal experience that we cannot fully understand Him: one who '*revealeth the deep and secret things*'; one who '*giveth wisdom unto the wise, and knowledge to them that know understanding*'; one who '*knoweth what is in the darkness*'¹⁰; one who '*only hath immortality, dwelling in the light which no man can approach unto; whom no man hath seen, nor can see*'.¹¹

There are, however, many facets of God and His character that we can understand and to which we can relate much more easily. In the Bible we learn that in physical terms there are many similarities between ourselves as creatures God has made and Himself as our creator. There are, for example, references to His arm, His hand, His heart; to the fact that He can see and hear and speak. It is also evident that we share many of His feelings and emotions. This is how God described Himself to Moses:

'...the Lord God, merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, Keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, and that will by no means clear the guilty.'¹²

These words reveal the two sides of God's character in His dealings with men and women; what the Apostle Paul in the New Testament describes as '*the goodness and severity of God*'.¹³ He continues by explaining that the severity is shown towards those who will have nothing to do with God, but that God Himself is only too willing to reveal His goodness towards those who are deserving of it. In these matters God acts very much like a father towards His children and this is how He so often presents Himself to us. It is a relationship that we can understand and respond to.

GOD'S INVITATION

We need to take positive action then if we are to become the children of God. This is the invitation which He has offered to all mankind throughout the ages - an invitation which very few have accepted:

'...come out from them [those who do not wish to know God] and be separate, says the Lord. Touch no unclean thing, and I will receive you, I will be a Father to you and you will be my sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty.'¹⁴

The fatherhood of God was very much in the mind of Jesus when he taught his disciples to pray. The familiar words of what has become known as the Lord's prayer refer to this Father and child relationship: '*Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name*'.¹⁵

⁹ Daniel 2.20,21 ¹⁰ Daniel 2.21,22 ¹¹ I Timothy 6.16 ¹² Exodus 34.6,7 ¹³ Romans 11.22

¹⁴ II Corinthians 6.17,18 (NIV) ¹⁵ Matthew 6.9



The heavenly Trifid Nebula - part of God's creation.

In the natural sense a good father always has his children's best interest at heart. He will train and educate them, he will provide for their needs, he will take pleasure in them when they respond to him in the way he wishes - but he will discipline them when necessary. His objective will always be to bring them up to be responsible people; to prepare them for their future adult role; to ensure that they will be able to live a happy and full life. It is not surprising to find that the fatherhood of God works on precisely these same principles.

In His Word, the Bible, God sets out very clearly what he is looking for from man. He tells us that He created the earth and everything in it for His pleasure: He tells us also that by his sin and his wickedness man has, just for the moment, deprived God of the pleasure that He wishes to have from His creation. But He explains that the time will definitely come when the earth and those who inhabit it will fulfil the purpose which their Maker originally envisaged. To quote the words of God Himself:

¹⁶But as truly as I live, all the earth shall be filled with the glory of the Lord.¹⁶

During the 6,000 years that have passed since the creation of man, God has been calling carefully selected people to be His children. He has done this in a number of different ways. Today the invitation to join His family comes through the Bible; through the writings of His prophets and apostles and other teachers, including His own son Jesus. Only those who are called by God to be His children - and who

¹⁶*Numbers 14.21*

respond faithfully to that calling - will receive the reward of eternal life to be spent on a reorganised and revitalised earth that will give God the pleasure and satisfaction for which it was designed and made. God, as a loving father, will be pleased to bestow this tremendous gift of life on those of His children who really make a serious attempt to serve Him now while they have the opportunity.

In the future age, when the only inhabitants of the earth will be the immortalised children of God, He will not exist as a remote being, but will actually dwell with them. We know this because Jesus himself tells us so in these words which describe what life will be like in that wonderful time that will come:

'Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.'¹⁷

Like so many aspects of God Himself we, as mere human beings, cannot really begin to appreciate the wonder of life on earth in the ages to come. As the Apostle Paul had to admit:

'...eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him.'¹⁸

Truly God does exist and will be the rewarder of those who earnestly seek Him.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENT - COVER PICTURE

Photograph of the Earth taken by the Apollo 8 astronauts.

¹⁷Revelation 21.3,4 (NIV) ¹⁸I Corinthians 2.9

ANIMAL RIGHTS

THE UK HAS become a battlefield over animal rights. On the one hand we have animals confined and transported long distances in trucks, reared in tiny crates, or factory farmed in conditions of gross overcrowding. On the other hand we have farmers in Britain claiming that their animals are pampered compared with conditions in other countries. Some animal rights protesters are trying to put animal rights before human rights.

What does the Bible say about the morality of our use or abuse of animals? *In the beginning* God made the animals for man. They were taken to Adam to be named and given into his custody.

'And God said ... Be fruitful, and multiply ... and have dominion over ... every living thing that moveth upon the earth.'¹

At first, Adam and Eve were vegetarians. It was only after they disobeyed God and became mortal that God killed animals to provide them with skins to wear. In this way, God emphasised that the consequence of sin was death and a sacrifice was necessary to cover their sin. This pointed forward to the sacrifice of Christ. Possibly the sacrifice of the animals was as abhorrent to Adam and Eve as their disobedience was to God.

After the flood Noah was told that he could use the animals for food.

'Every moving thing that liveth shall be meat for you; even as the green herb have I given you all things.'²

Later, when God's Law was written down by Moses, the details of how the Israelites were to slaughter animals for food and sacrifices was laid down and they had to adhere strictly to the laws of hygiene. Although instances of cruelty to animals are recorded, the Law of Moses tried to prevent such abuses and to remind men that they were responsible to God for the way they treated His creation.

It would seem that only in recent generations has man been responsible for the annihilation of species by pollution and abuses such as hunting and overfishing. Indiscriminate cruelty towards domestic animals has grown, alongside the abuse and destruction of wildlife. The basic cause of this ill-treatment of animals can be seen to be human greed and it would appear that only God's intervention will curb such excesses.

In the near future we believe that God will indeed intervene. Jesus Christ will shortly return to the earth to re-establish the conditions which prevailed in Eden prior to Adam and Eve's disobedience. Only then will man's cruel and predatory instincts be controlled, and nature will no longer be red in tooth and claw.

'The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb ... and a little child shall lead them ... They shall not hurt or destroy in all my holy mountain; for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea.'³

¹Genesis 1.28 ²Genesis 9.3 ³Isaiah 11.6-9

Bible Manners and Customs

IN THIS NEW series of articles, we intend to examine aspects of life in Bible times which will hopefully enrich our knowledge and understanding of the Word of God and also provide some lessons for those who wish to please God today. The Bible as a record of life and living, covers a very wide period, from the earliest recorded days of man's existence right through to the first century AD. Some of the manners and customs will seem very strange to us who live in 1995 and yet many will have a familiar note about them, being carried through to our own times.

Archaeology, or the study of human antiquities, has been the means of bringing to light, sometimes literally, the customs of centuries past. It is true to say that the excavations of the archaeologist not only expose the past in great detail, but they also testify to the veracity of God's Word. However, that is not the *primary* intention with these articles. The reader is recommended to read **Light on Archaeology** if this *is* the prime interest. Our purpose is rather to understand the meaning of many things that we read and observe and to do this, we need to stand in the shoes of those who lived in Bible times. Then, we shall appreciate more completely why certain things were done or said. Some of these customs, particularly those that relate to God's own nation Israel, were a matter of **command** and again, we hope to see why this is the case.

Let us begin with an example from the Old Testament.

RESPONSIBILITY

Israel's first responsibility was to their God. The first of the ten commandments made this very clear. Jesus reminded one of the scribes of this:

'The first of all the commandments is, Hear, O Israel; The Lord our God is one Lord: ...'¹

Love for God, in keeping His commands was a primary requirement of the Law by means of which Israel were governed. God looked, of course, for a *loving* understanding of what He wanted. The same applied to the second commandment:

'And the second is like, namely this, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. There is none other commandment greater than these.'²

So, Israel were taught responsibility for each other. The law given through Moses set out in great detail just what these responsibilities were and one of them forms the subject of our first custom.

¹Mark 12.29 ²Mark 12.31

In the book of Deuteronomy, we read how Moses prepares the people for entry into the promised land of Canaan. In chapter 22 we read this:

'When thou buildest a new house, then thou shalt make a battlement for thy roof, that thou bring not blood upon thine house, if any man fall from thence.'³

What a wise provision! Of course, we might well wonder what on earth a person would be doing upon the roof of his neighbour's house? Visions of slates blown off in the gale and a well-meaning neighbour helping us out are inappropriate here! We need to look at the typical house of the Middle East town or village to realise that the flat roof top was often used by the family and by any visitors to the house. In the hot weather the roof was often the coolest place to sleep. It also provided a private place and either of these might be the reason why we read this:

'And when they were come down from the high place into the city, Samuel communed with Saul **upon the top of the house**. And they arose early: and it came to pass about the spring of the day, that Samuel called Saul to the top of the house, saying, Up, that I may send thee away.'⁴

We have another example of the top of the house being used, this time in the New Testament, in the case of Peter.

'On the morrow, as they went on their journey, and drew nigh unto the city, Peter went up **upon the housetop** to pray about the sixth hour'⁵

There can be little doubt that Peter used the house top for privacy, and it was here that he fell asleep - not surprising if he had journeyed and given the heat of the sixth hour, namely mid-day. Well, these examples will suffice to show the importance of the roof top to householders in Eastern countries. The writer noted with interest the North African style houses in the hinterland of Fuerteventura in the Canary Islands. Flat roofs are normal. Parapets or battlements, as they are described in the Bible, are essential for the safety of the householder and his visitors. The HEBREW word, we have translated in the Authorised Version of the Bible as **battlement**, may equally read **parapet**. European castles made full use of the broken parapet or battlement for defensive purposes behind which a man might hide and then pour molten lead or other unmentionable objects, upon those seeking to overthrow the stronghold.

Today, particularly in the Western world, householders take care to see that they have suitable insurance against third party claims for injury arising from, say, a broken footpath. In a sense, that was the purpose of the law concerning battlements in the Law of Moses - it protected the householder. Provided he or she had built a battlement, they would not, as the Bible puts it '*bring blood upon thine house*.'⁶

WASHING THE FEET OF YOUR GUESTS

In the Bible there are a number of references to feet being washed as a courtesy towards a guest. Where the soil is dry and dusty and sandals are the usual wear, as in Biblical times, feet quickly get very dirty and gritty, leading to discomfort and

³Deuteronomy 22.8 ⁴1 Samuel 9.25,26 ⁵Acts 10.9 ⁶Deuteronomy 22.8



Typical house in the Apostle Peter's days

unhealthy feet. In such circumstances, the host would first of all offer to his newly arrived guest a bowl of water. If the host were able to afford servants, then the servants would do the work. Otherwise, the host himself would expect to get down on his knees and perform the task. It was a custom of the time, though one which tarmac roads and more substantial footwear have largely made unnecessary. In Africa today as in other similar countries, the need still remains for regular washing of the feet. Even in northern climes we appreciate the soothing effect of cool water on hot and sore feet, especially in very hot weather.

We have an illustration of this in the life of Abraham. The account in Genesis tells us:

'And the LORD appeared unto him [Abraham] in the plains of Mamre: and he sat in the tent door in the heat of the day; And he lift up his eyes and looked, and, lo, three men stood by him: and when he saw them, he ran to meet them from the tent door, and bowed himself toward the ground, And said, My Lord, if now I have found favour in thy sight, pass not away, I pray thee, from thy servant: Let a little water, I pray you, be fetched, **and wash your feet**, and rest yourselves under the tree:....'⁷

⁷Genesis 18.1-4

Now, it is clear from the record that at the time he made these men welcome, Abraham did not realise that they were angels sent from God. So he offered them the refreshment of water for their feet and later food for their needs. Abraham was extending the courtesy of the times. Later on, Lot his nephew, was to do the same thing (see *Genesis 19.2*). The steward of Joseph gave the same attention to the needs of Joseph's brethren when they arrived in Egypt from the land of Canaan. The custom would be much like ours when we offer a cup of water or tea or coffee to our newly arrived guests. It makes them feel at home and we then offer them the facilities of our house. Perhaps it is a shame that it is all too easy to direct our guests to the bathroom and leave them to refresh themselves!

Taking the lesson from this old custom, of course, is the important thing. In the New Testament we have the record of Christ in the house of Simon the Pharisee. Simon had objected to the attention given to Christ by a woman of doubtful morals - at least, she is described as a sinner. The woman not only used some very precious and costly ointment upon Christ, but washed his feet with her tears and wiped them dry with her long hair. It was a touching and poignant act on her part, which Christ appreciated. He used it as the opportunity to reprove Simon the Pharisee, who certainly saw himself superior to the woman. So Christ said to Simon: '*Simon, I have somewhat to say unto thee....*' What Christ said is set out in Luke chapter 7 and verses 40 to 47. They are well worth reading for the lesson they have, based upon this ancient custom of washing the feet. The point that Christ was making is well summed up by the Master: 'Simon, Seest thou this woman? I entered into thine house, thou gavest me **no water for my feet:** but she hath washed my feet with tears, and wiped them with the hairs of her head.'⁸

Simon the Pharisee, who no doubt saw himself far above the woman in terms of holiness and separation from sin, was thus reprov'd by Christ. Sometimes, we can be so pre-occupied in pursuing righteousness that we can miss the fundamentals of service to Christ. Simon, who *thought* he was doing well, was left in no doubt what Christ thought:

'Thou gavest me no kiss: but this woman since the time I came in hath not ceased to kiss my feet. My head with oil thou didst not anoint: but this woman hath anointed my feet with ointment. Wherefore I say unto thee, her sins which are many, are forgiven; for she loved much: but to whom little is forgiven, the same loveth little.'⁹

Food for thought!

Finally, Paul exhorted with these words:

'Be not forgetful to entertain strangers: for thereby some have entertained angels unawares.'¹⁰

No doubt he had in mind Abraham's experience. Even *further* food for thought, we suggest!

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⁸Luke 7.44 ⁹Luke 7.45-47 ¹⁰Hebrews 13.2

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